

## Assessment of Management Effectiveness at Belum Rainforest Resort (BRR), Malaysia; with Special Focus on Process

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**Abstract:** Presently, most of the countries in the world are concerned about environmental degradation. One of the avenues to protect the environment is the active promotion of ecotourism which shows a growing niche market within the big travel industries and possesses the potential of being an important sustainable developmental tool. Of all the activities conducted by the management of ecotourism, process of development and management are found lacking, and this has a great impact on the intention of creating and developing ecotourism in a country. The absence of proper process of management in ecotourism calls for the implementation process in ecotourism which is crucial in developing ecotourism, particularly in Belum Rainforest Resort in Malaysia. Moreover, the research made use of qualitative research approach involving the use of secondary data that relate to the process of assessing management effectively. The result showed that process determines whether or not the best systems and processes for management are in use. Consequently, well-planned protected areas need sound management processes if they are to be effective.

**Keywords:** *Belum Rainforest Resort, Process, Management Effectiveness, Ecotourism*

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### 1. Introduction

In recent years, research has shown that ecotourism has been given much attention with the hope of continuous patronage. Ecotourism is described as an act of tourism which encourages learning experiences together with appreciation of natural endowment in the cultural context. Moreover, Garrod (2012) stressed that ecotourism, as shown Figures 1-5, possesses features of environmentally and socio-culturally sustainability as a result of the enhancement it brings to the culturally resource based destination and operation. Meanwhile, Orams (1995) emphasized the initiatives of ecotourism due to the increasing spread of natural environment together with the recognition of the importance of conserving the quality of natural environment.

**Fig. 1: Ornamental Ecotourism**



**Fig. 2: Natural Ecotourism**



**Fig. 3: Snow Ecotourism**



**Fig. 4: Ecotourist**



**Fig. 5: Beach Ecotourism**



Furthermore, Belum Rainforest Resort (BRR) in Malaysia is perceived to be a good ecotourism destination, intending to create a viable and sustainable tourism opportunity which minimizes the impact of industries on the environment. The BRR fosters environmental development and cultural awareness, empowers local communities, and raises awareness of the political, environmental and social issues of the concerned countries, including visitors and hosts (Cosser, 2007). Besides, ecotourism has to be developed carefully because it has the potential to create positive environmental and social impacts, but can unknowingly destroy as a result of mass tourism if not properly managed. Research has shown that of all the activities done by the management of ecotourism, process of development and management are found as lacking factors, which greatly impacts the intention of creating and developing ecotourism in a country. Therefore, this research is an attempt to study the implementation process in ecotourism as a vital component in developing BRR's ecotourism initiatives which would positively impact their management. In addition, BRR is expected to focus more on the process of assessing management effectiveness as this is dependent on the process applied. Indeed, the process is considered as an important independent variable in the assessment of management effectiveness of BRR. This is as a result of benchmark's role model of BRR to other ecotourisms in the world. Besides that, BRR may be used as standard benchmark or best practice guidelines in managing the tourist center effectively. In other words, some agencies have defined benchmarks for a wide range of protected area management activities through policies, procedures, manuals and best practice guidelines (Hockings et al., 2006). Thus, it is easier to give staff and evaluators a very clear idea of the expectation. For instance, BRR may use manuals that outline the expected design and maintenance standards for visitor facilities.

Admittedly, a protected area or protected agency has explicitly described some guidelines and codes of practice published by organization like IUCN as platform to ease the assessment of ecotourism (Hockings et al., 2006). In order to ensure that BRR achieves the features of ecotourism effectively and efficiently, the resort has to look at the implementation of management systems and processes that are often involved in ecotourism such as planning, natural resource assessment management, cultural resource assessment management, maintenance, facility development, patrol and enforcement, communication, education and advocacy, training, research, monitoring and evaluation, reporting, visitor management, management of resource use by humans (extractive, tourism), participation, conflict resolution, personnel management and budget and financial control. Conclusively, this research intends to assess how effective the management of BRR is, in promoting management standards and improving management capacity.

## **2. Literature Review**

The assessment of management effectiveness is defined as the evaluation of how well the protected area is being managed-primarily as well as the extent to which it is protecting value and achieving goals and objectives (Hockings et al., 2006). Pursuing this further, management effectiveness consists of three main themes:

1. Design issue relating to both individual sites and protected area system.
2. Adequacy and appropriateness of management systems and processes.
3. Delivery of protected area objectives including conservation of value.

According to Hockings et al. (2006), the method that is always used to assess effectiveness differs between protected areas but depends on factors like time and available resources, the importance of the site, data quality and stakeholder pressures. On the contrary, the variation in situation of the protected areas require variation in methods of assessment. Moreover, many assessment tools have been developed and tested for guiding and recording changes in management practices (Hockings et al., 2006). The assessment of management effectiveness have now been undertaken in many of the protected areas. This leads to the intervention of international organizations that are concerned in working with protected areas, such as IUCN and its World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility as well as non governmental organisations (NGOs). The NGOs like WWF and The Nature

Conservancy have taken a lead in promoting the importance of management effectiveness of the protected areas and providing technical development, and making process an important factor for assessment management (Hockings et al., 2006).

**Process:** Process is an important variable when assessing management effectiveness. The foundation of process assessment focuses on the standard of management within a protected area and its requirements (Hockings et al., 2006). Besides that, process can be viewed in terms of:

1. Definition of acceptable systems and standards of the best practice (benchmarks).
2. Decisions which could be required in the particular systems and individual protected areas.
3. Investigation of whether systems are being implemented and standards are being met.
4. Recommendations as to whether the systems and standards are appropriate or need to be improved.

Admittedly, previous researches have shown that management action process is important to support the objectives in order to fulfil the designed standards and to achieve the level of effectiveness. Indeed, management actions are usually involved in two inter-related considerations as what to manage and what techniques or approaches to apply to the target flow (Higginbottom, 2004). This shows that a manager needs to identify elements of the system that are most closely associated to the prevailing circumstances. Besides that, the process flow that is moving forward towards the target will be systematic. There are many approaches that specifically catered to managing visitors and operators of tourist sites, such as budget management, education and awareness, stakeholder engagement and monitoring and controlling. Each approach may influence management's motivation and behavior, while deciding management of ecotourism. Higginbottom (2004) stressed that the criteria to achieve effective ecotourism need to be compared in order to ensure their perfection. These criteria are listed as follows:

1. Effectiveness
2. Compatibility with other management objectives
3. Magnitude of negative impacts on acceptable wildlife
4. Acceptability to stakeholders
5. Availability of required labor and expertise
6. Financial and legal constraints

In addition, management actions should not be isolated in any way as it comprises of some useful areas (Higginbottom, 2004). Research has shown that if the process and systems in which the BRR is applied is essential for good management, a regular audit of such systems helps to achieve better management outcomes (Hockings et al., 2006).

**Importance of Process Management:** The protected areas need sound management processes in order to be effective, well-planned and supported. Therefore, the management process is important due to the existence of a range of accepted procedures that is helpful to maintain the standards of good management. According to Hockings et al. (2006), although many protected areas are managed by people with excellent knowledge of ecology and wildlife, they lack past training in management. This has led to issues concerning increase in staff numbers and boosting expectations. Presently, managers are expected to deal with increasing range of issues, such as community relations, workplace safety and management of sacred sites within protected areas that have gained a greater emphasis in the last few years. In addition, higher levels of accountability are often expected, but management processes may be incapable of keeping abreast of all the changes.

**Method for Assessing Management Effectiveness:** Previous research emphasized that the needed element to assess effectiveness is the management of budget. The budget is a primary resource that has to be managed effectively because of the important role it plays in conserving cultural and environmental elements for effective ecotourism development. The specialized fees and taxes need to be channeled into resource protection and visitor management. Indeed, budget management helps develop objective policies and the budgetary mechanisms for proper funding. Besides that, management of these elements must be well coordinated and utilized in order to ensure handling of financial activities and solving unexpected problems in BRR. Moreover, engagement of stakeholders is another element or factor that is necessary in the management effectiveness assessment. The stakeholders in this domain include local authorities who often regulate land use, control key infrastructure together with protected areas and the manager who is responsible for management of visitors in the fragile natural areas (Wood, 2002). The government agencies that are designed to administer tourism areas are vulnerable to bureaucratic developments which may diminish their capacity and willingness to protect ecosystem functions (Isaacs, 2000). At the same time, the regulatory agencies that are subjected to regulatory capture have the tendency to fall under the influence of the industries that are supposed to be monitored. Besides these, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also developing many programs such as research on best practices, guide training, regional planning and stake meetings, community development, protected area management, and targeted conservation initiatives in order to have efficient management of assessment.

Pursuing this further, the third element is education and awareness. The hotel managed Marine Reserve is one example of management which is successful in developing education and awareness programs for tourists, staff and the local community for higher management effectiveness (Svensson et al., 2008). The developed programs include recycling programs and campaigns for protecting environment to ensure that tourists, staff and the local communities awareness is increased. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation processes cannot be overemphasized as the needed factors in ensuring the effectiveness of BRR. According to Hockings et al. (2004), the ecotourism's determination of what to monitor should be addressed in the earlier management planning process of selecting indicators. The question of how to monitor is mostly generic but monitoring the impacts of any human development or activity on the natural environment requires field techniques suited to the species in question which often requires a specialist's knowledge or advise (Higginbottom, 2004). Moreover, it is important for ecotourism to be evaluated often in order to determine whether standards are being met when assuming the effective monitoring. If the standards are not met, then the applied management actions have to be reconsidered and modified, which would eventually lead to better effectiveness of BRR and its business.

### 3. Methodology

The qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this research, which involved the use of secondary and primary data for conducting the research. All information related to the process of assessing management effectiveness are gathered to support the research. The secondary information used in the research are gathered from journals and websites. Hence, several previous research and articles concerning the conceptual method are also used for authenticating evidence.

### 4. Findings

The results from the process indicate that the application of appropriate management processes in BRR has contributed to management effectiveness ( $\beta = 0.275$ ,  $t = 7.69$ ).

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta
H <sub>A</sub>	Process -> Effectiveness	0.275
std error	t value	Decision
0.04	7.69**	H <sub>A</sub> supported

Specifically, the process tries to determine whether the best systems and processes for management are used and to determine the established policies and procedures are in practice. The result also highlights what areas of management require attention to improve the capacity of managers for undertaking their work. Clearly, the finding shows that adoption of the best possible management process and systems is essential for effective management and the notion of best process or practices provides a guide to assessing the appropriateness of management processes in improving level of management effectiveness. Well-planned protected areas need sound management processes if they are to be effective. A range of accepted procedures can help, along with standards of good management. Therefore, involving the staff together with the process may indicate that processes are optimal for effective management whereby staff may have strong opinions on the processes that are helpful and free from problems. Certainly, elements which measured the process include maintenance of management and operational tool, monitoring of access control and educational program for awareness to the stakeholder and tourist. An investigation into the elements of a process that highly tap the variety of processes and then contribute to the management effectiveness indicate that maintenance of managerial and operational equipment moderately explain the process factor under study. The highest element of the process is controlling access and exit to BRR, followed by the element of the planned education program for stakeholders and the visitors. These elements are found to be the main contributor of well-planned process that need to be emphasized by the BRR (e.g. education for native people). Therefore, the adoption of the best possible management processes and systems is essential for effective management.

Clearly, two main processes that are highlighted in this research namely stakeholder engagement, and education and awareness have major roles to play in effective management of ecotourism. First, the term stakeholder refers to parties or groups whose interests are directly affected by any ecotourism-related activities (Wood, 2002). Stakeholders include the communities which may be directly or indirectly affected by any development, like civil society groups in the area, local government units that have political and administrative jurisdictions over the particular site and local branches of national line agencies (Tourism and environmental departments). Stakeholder engagement (the government, NGOs and other agencies) collaborate with BRR to establish a deeper understanding, or communication of the places and people they visit and brings a lot of impact to the BRR. At the same time, the environment refers to the unique physical features or attributes of a locality that serves as its primary attraction. It also refers to distinct socio-cultural patterns exhibited by indigenous communities which result from centuries of intimate intercourse with the natural environment. The relationship between the stakeholders and the environment is anticipated to result in better environmental education and consciousness, as well as increased community cooperation and preservation of local culture at ecotourism sites. The implementation of appropriate national together with local policies and guidelines help ensure environmental protection. Indirectly, these policies and guidelines also contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge, practices and systems (Wood, 2002). Moreover, the processes that focus on the assessment of management effectiveness is education and awareness. Thus, environmental programs that should be considered in managing a company include campaigns, talks and many activities. It should be ensured that employees in BRR are motivated to increase their environmental awareness. Besides that, the media publications should help to increase awareness of management in BRR. Hence, the resort should frequently transmit programs about its activities and the environments in which they operate. This would encourage employees' to pay attention to the process and hence ensuring a productive outcome of the effective assessment of management.

### 5. Conclusion

Process has been considered as major issue in achieving effective managerial and organizational functions. The lack of developmental and managerial processes have been highlighted in BRR organization leading to the implementation of process in BRR ecotourism in order to achieve a model of ecotourism in Malaysia. It is evident from this research that process is the main issue in achieving sustainable ecotourism. Proper application of process in an ecotourism brings about a model of ecotourism. Hence, BRR possesses the potential to achieve competitive advantage if properly managed through the procedures and context provided by this research.

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